

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PAPER: Describing African American and Caucasian Criminals on Fox News: A Comparison of Word and Verb Choice

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I hypothesize that the crimes committed by male African American criminals on Fox News will be described using the reporting verb *say* by victims and witnesses more frequently than the crimes committed by male Caucasian criminals. In contrast, I hypothesize that the crimes committed by male Caucasian criminals on Fox News will be described using the negative reporting verb *claim* by victims and witnesses more frequently than the crimes committed by male African American criminals. It is also hypothesized that the active voice will be used more frequently to describe the actions of male African American criminals than it will be for male Caucasian criminals, while the passive voice will be used more frequently to describe the actions of male Caucasian criminals than it will be for male African American criminals. Although racism is not as apparent as it was before, it is argued by Entman (1992, 1990) that a more subtle form of racism still exists. The news is an example of this subtle type of racism; even though it is

prohibited to broadcast a report with racially offensive language, the choice of specific words and grammar suggests a racial bias.

This study examines the frequency of the reporting verbs *say/said* and *claim/claimed* among Caucasian and African American criminals on the local Fox news channel (Fox 59 News). The reporting verbs were chosen as a result of an hour pre-viewing of Fox 59 News. Because the words were used in the pre-viewing, they were selected for the study. The reporting verb *claim* is described as 'negative' while the reporting verb *say* is described as neutral on the basis of former literature on these two verbs. Additionally, the frequency of active and passive voice will be examined among both races. The active voice is used to indicate that the subject is *performing the action* (e.g. 'he killed the man'). The passive voice is used to indicate that the subject is *being the recipient of the action* (e.g. 'the man was killed'). The active and passive voice were chosen for the study because it is argued that crimes are less accepted when using the active voice while crimes that use the passive voice are viewed as more acceptable (Henley and Miller, 1995). The two reporting verbs and the active and passive voice will be collected by watching 'Fox 59 News at 10 on the Fox channel each night for a period of ten weeks. Each newscast will be recorded, and the two reporting verbs, as well as the instances of active and passive voice will be counted to determine 1) the frequency of the reporting verbs and active/passive voice overall (of both racial groups in ten weeks) 2) the frequency of the reporting verbs and active/passive voice about each racial group in

the ten week period and 3) the frequency of the reporting verbs used by victims/witnesses and the criminals themselves and the frequency of the active/passive voice used by police/detectives/investigators, victims/witnesses and reporters.

The results of this study will portray the harmful depictions of minority groups on the local Fox news (Fox 59). The depictions of African American criminals on Fox are harmful because the audience is likely to apply exaggerated descriptions of the race to the real world. It is especially harmful since the local area (Indianapolis) is predominantly White. Because of this fact, it is more difficult for the local community to construct their own perspectives on African Americans based on personal observations and experiences. The issue of African American stereotypes will continue unless people are aware of this issue. It is hoped that by portraying the unfair treatment of African Americans on Fox News, viewers will not assume that African Americans are more likely to commit crimes. Moreover, the results will help to develop awareness to those who believe that racism is no longer an issue in our society.

This paper begins with the introduction. The introduction includes the general and specific objectives and goals of the study, the hypotheses and the significance of the study. Chapter two contains the literature review, which provides information on previous literature that is relevant to my topic. The third chapter provides, in detail, the method used for the study. The method used is justified by demonstrating how it will

prove or disprove my hypotheses. The paper concludes with the results and the discussion of the study.